

For Immediate Release
January 11, 2016

Evansville Pastor Receives Sagamore of the Wabash Award

Indianapolis, IN – Reverend Everett Freels, founder of Churches Embracing Offenders (CEO) in Evansville, received the Sagamore of the Wabash award from Governor Mike Pence for his work with Indiana's ex-offenders. Governor Pence presented this award to Reverend Freels at the Baptist Ministers and Deacons Alliance Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship Banquet in Evansville, IN, on January 9, 2016.

After attending Franklin Pilgrim College, Rev. Freels graduated with a degree in education from Indiana State University. In 1969, he was called to preach and he and his family eventually made their way to Trinity Wesleyan Church in Evansville in 1989. In 1999 he began working with the Vanderburgh County Jail to address its overcrowding issue and six months later, he launched Churches Embracing Offenders receiving their first client in 2000. Today CEO has 286 active participating clients, 150 partnering churches and offices in 13 counties. The results have been nothing short of remarkable with more than 89% of their clients avoiding returning to the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC). Rev. Freels has been a religious volunteer at the IDOC's Branchville Correctional Facility since 2007.

"We are working to help citizens re-enter society and become productive, reliable workers," said Governor Pence. "We couldn't be successful in reducing recidivism without buy-in from the community – especially our faith leaders like Reverend Everett Freels - whose organization offers faith-based recovery programs through a network of more than 60 area churches. We have all heard stories of recovery and reintegration because of the work of Reverend Freels and the CEO program. And because this issue is so close to my heart, I'd like to present Reverend Freels with a Sagamore of the Wabash."

IDOC Commissioner Bruce Lemmon said, "Reverend Freels' contributions to the successes of the mission of the IDOC cannot be overstated. He is a man of deep faith who has dedicated his life in service to others, and we owe him our deepest gratitude."

ABOUT THE AWARD

The term "sagamore" was used by the American Indian Tribes of the northeastern United States to describe a great man among the tribe to whom the chief would look for wisdom and advice. Similarly, the Sagamore of the Wabash is reserved for those Hoosiers who have rendered distinguished service to the state and contributed greatly to our Hoosier heritage.

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Media Contact:

Douglas S. Garrison
Chief Communications Officer
Phone: (317) 232-5780
dsgarrison@idoc.in.gov